

THE FRANCO-ITALIAN NAVAL DISPUTE

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with the aid of the Research Staff of the Foreign Policy Association

INTRODUCTION

IT is widely recognized that the final outcome of the Franco-Italian naval controversy will have a direct bearing on the prospects of the General Disarmament Conference. Even the most sanguine statesmen have acknowledged that failure to solve the relatively simple question of French and Italian naval programs would increase the difficulties confronting the larger Conference in 1932. That Conference has been called for February 2, and will bring together some sixty nations for the avowed purpose of reaching agreement on land, naval and air armaments.

The obstacles encountered in reaching a satisfactory accord between the two Mediterranean powers emphasize, on a small scale, the difficulties which will face the Disarmament Conference. One of these is the close relation existing between so-called technical questions and broad political considerations. Some observers have suggested that the delay in reaching a satisfactory settlement has been due to the failure to adjust outstanding political differences between the two countries and to achieve a sound basis for security.¹ A second difficulty is that caused by national fears and suspicions. On more than one occasion, as the following summary will show, France and Italy appeared to be on the threshold of an accord, only to have the agreement undermined by a revival of nationalist agitation on one side or the other.

Still a third difficulty is the fixing of agreed ratios of naval (or, in the case of the General Disarmament Conference, land, naval and air) strength. The problem of fixing the relative strength of the French and Italian navies was the crux of the naval controversy, and throughout the negotiations it proved impossible to find any arbitrary standard for determining tonnage levels at

which the two fleets might be limited. The same problem, in a vastly more complex form, confronts the Disarmament Conference. The Preparatory Commission, when asked to suggest methods for determining ratios of military strength, was forced to confess that this question must be left for each power to determine for itself, taking into account its geographical situation, its resources and its national and international commitments.²

POSITION OF FRANCE AND ITALY AT THE LONDON CONFERENCE

At the London Naval Conference of 1930, France and Italy were unable to arrive at any agreement on the size of their respective fleets. Italy consistently demanded the right to build up to "parity" with France; France as consistently declined to admit the principle of equality. The failure to settle this controversy not only prevented a five-power naval limitation treaty, but threatened as well to disturb the three-power agreement between the United States, Great Britain and Japan.³

Of the principal naval powers, Great Britain was most directly concerned in the outcome of the Franco-Italian dispute. Article 21 of the London Treaty, known as the "escalator clause," was inserted at the request of Great Britain, which was unwilling to accept a binding limitation while there was danger of competitive building by France and Italy. Article 21, therefore, permitted Great Britain, the United States, or Japan to increase its tonnage beyond the treaty levels if any of these powers believed that it was threatened by the new construction of another power whose ships were not limited by Part 3 of the Treaty. Recognizing the danger to the three-power pact

2. Cf. League of Nations, Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, *Report of Sub-Commission A*, C.739.-M.278.1926.IX. (C.P.D.28).

3. Cf. W. T. Stone, "The London Naval Conference," *F. P. A. Information Service*, Vol. VI, No. 6, May 28, 1930.

1. For discussion of political differences, cf. Vera M. Dean, "France and Italy in the Mediterranean," *F. P. A. Information Service*, Vol. VI, No. 1, March 19, 1930.

should Franco-Italian naval rivalry continue, Great Britain offered its good offices in assisting the two Continental powers to settle their differences and join the other powers in a full naval accord.⁴

During the London Conference, the French delegation produced figures to show that the "present strength" of the French navy was 681,808 tons,⁵ and that by December 31, 1936, it would total 724,479 tons distributed as follows:⁶

ESTIMATED STRENGTH OF FRENCH NAVY BY DECEMBER 31, 1936	
	tons
Capital ships	209,257
Eight-inch-gun cruisers	100,000
Old cruisers	24,850
Light cruisers, destroyers, torpedo boats, etc.	258,597
Aircraft carriers	32,146
Submarines	99,629
TOTAL	724,479

This figure was subsequently reduced to 713,000 tons, and it was explained that out of 240,000 tons of new ships which France would build between 1930 and 1936, only 43,200 tons would be supplementary construction, the remaining 196,800 tons being for "replacement" of old vessels. Italy, throughout the Conference, declined to discuss tonnage figures until the question of ratios had been settled, but offered to accept any figures, no matter how low, provided they were not exceeded by any other Continental power.

A number of proposals and counter-proposals for the solution of the Franco-Italian controversy were put forth during the final weeks of the London Conference, but when the Conference adjourned the positions of the two powers were almost as far apart as they had been at the opening of the sessions three months before.

4. Cf. Declaration of Prime Minister MacDonald in the House of Commons, *Parliamentary Debates*, April 30, 1930.

5. This figure was reached by including in the tonnage totals not only the over-age vessels mentioned above, but also a large number of non-combatant ships, such as mine-layers, training cruisers, dispatch vessels and seaplane carriers. Vessels of this type were not limited by the London Treaty, and are not usually included in the combatant tonnage of other countries. Moreover, the inclusion of vessels under construction or appropriated for in tables showing existing strength is always misleading. The total tonnage of French combatant vessels actually in commission in 1930 was approximately 461,000 tons, as compared with 249,000 tons for Italian combatant vessels actually in commission. Based on figures published in *Hearing before Subcommittee of House Committee on Appropriations*, Navy Department Appropriation Bill for 1932 (71st Congress, 3rd session).

6. *Documents of the London Naval Conference*, cited, p. 520.

SUBSEQUENT EFFORTS TO REACH AGREEMENT

Subsequent efforts to reach an agreement were not encouraging. On April 30 Italy published its naval program for the financial year ending June 30, 1931, which provided for construction of 42,900 tons of new vessels, matching the French program ton for ton.⁸ On May 12 Mussolini delivered the first of a series of provocative speeches, declaring at Leghorn that: "There is something inescapable, inevitable, in the march toward destiny of Fascist Italy. . . . Nobody can halt it." In Florence, on May 17, Mussolini began a military review with the statement that: "Words are very fine things, but muskets, machine guns, ships, airplanes and guns are still finer things; they are finer because right, if unaccompanied by might, is an empty word."⁹

In France, the speeches of the Italian dictator and the announcement of the new naval program were bitterly attacked in the press. A leading Paris newspaper declared: "Italy is deliberately taking the initiative in a policy of increasing naval armaments, although the London Conference was intended to create a wide movement in favor of reduction."¹⁰

The wide publicity given to Mussolini's speeches abroad, particularly in France, obscured what might otherwise have been regarded as a conciliatory move by Italy. Foreign Minister Grandi, speaking before the Italian Chamber on the question of foreign policy on May 9, declared the readiness of Italy to begin negotiations with France.¹¹ A few days later the first effort to effect a compromise was made at Geneva, May 12 to 14, where the meeting of the League of Nations Council afforded an opportunity for discussion by the Foreign Ministers of the three interested powers. No progress was made, however, and negotiations were allowed to lapse.

Fresh evidence of a desire to compromise was forthcoming from Italy. On June 3 Foreign Minister Grandi told the Italian Senate that the government was willing to suspend its program of new construction for

8. One 8-inch-gun cruiser of 10,000 tons; two 6-inch-gun cruisers of 5,100 tons each; 4 destroyers of 1,240 tons each; 22 submarines (4 of 1,390 tons, 6 of 810 tons, 12 of 610 tons).

9. *New York Times*, May 18, 1930.

10. *Le Temps* (Paris), May 3, 1930.

11. *The Times* (London), May 10, 1930.

1930, pending the course of negotiations on the naval questions, provided France did likewise. The offer was not accepted by France, where resentment against the speeches of Mussolini was still running high. Once again Franco-Italian relations reached an *impasse*. The press of both countries claimed that their respective governments had made friendly overtures which had found no response across the border. Newspaper editorials in France denounced the Italian military attitude, attributing it to unjustified nervousness, a desire for expansion, and an intention to disturb the peace of Europe. Italian newspapers replied with the charge that France was fortifying her frontier against Italy, was expending vast sums of money on armaments and war material, and inciting her ally, Yugoslavia, against Italy.¹²

THE FRANCO-ITALIAN NAVAL HOLIDAY

On July 7 a *détente* began. M. Briand told the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French Chamber that he had officially informed Mussolini of France's readiness to suspend laying down new ships until December 1, 1930, in order to permit a renewal of negotiations between the two countries. On July 14 Mussolini declared his readiness to observe the proposed holiday. While skeptics pointed out that both French and Italian shipyards were already filled to capacity with new construction, the brief holiday had a psychological effect on opinion in both countries, and afforded a basis for amicable discussion.

Reaching a definite accord, however, was to prove a more difficult matter. Negotiations began in Paris during the middle of August 1930 with M. Massigli, the French Foreign Office expert, representing France, and Sr. Rosso representing Italy. Various proposals were considered, but no solution had been reached by September when Mr. Alexander, First Lord of the British Admiralty, visited Paris and Rome in a fruitless effort to find an acceptable compromise. Conversations were continued in Geneva during the meetings of the Council and As-

sembly, but again resulted in no agreement. In October the United States entered the discussions for the first time when Ambassador Hugh S. Gibson proceeded to Paris and Rome before going to Geneva for the League of Nations Preparatory Disarmament Commission. But his efforts, like those of Mr. Alexander, proved unavailing. When the naval truce expired on December 1, 1930, agreement was not yet in sight.

GREAT BRITAIN INTERVENES

When it became apparent that Franco-Italian negotiations had again reached an *impasse* in February 1931, Great Britain once more entered the negotiations, this time with the active intervention of Mr. Arthur Henderson, the British Foreign Secretary. What alarmed Mr. Henderson in particular was the report that the French Ministry of Marine was preparing a naval program for 1931-1932 which would include a new 23,000-ton "pocket battleship" to offset the redoubtable German *Panzerkreuzer (Ersatz-Preussen)*,¹³ on which work was rapidly proceeding. The British Foreign Office foresaw that once France proceeded with a new type of battleship before reaching an accord acceptable to Italy and Great Britain, there would be little hope of avoiding a fresh armaments race.

Mr. R. L. Craigie, naval expert of the British Foreign Office, therefore proceeded to Paris where, with the greatest secrecy, he undertook to bring the positions of the three countries into harmony.¹⁴ On February 18 the French Chamber of Deputies voted the 1931-1932 naval budget, totaling \$123,000,000 and including \$39,000,000 for new construction. M. Dumont, Minister of Marine, announced that the construction program would be delayed a few weeks longer, pending the outcome of the negotiations then in process, but warned that the naval bill could not be held up indefinitely.¹⁵ The credits voted revealed that the 23,000-ton battleship would be authorized in the forthcoming bill.

13. This cruiser, christened the *Deutschland*, was launched at Kiel on May 18, 1931. Credits for a second cruiser of the same type were voted by the Reichstag on March 20, 1931. Cf. *New York Herald Tribune*, March 21, 1931.

14. *Le Temps* (Paris), February 13, 1931.

15. *Ibid.*, February 19, 1931.

12. Cf. "A Franco-Italian *Détente*," *F. P. A. News Bulletin*, Vol. IX, No. 37, July 18, 1930.

HENDERSON VISITS PARIS AND ROME

The results of these negotiations had not been made public when on February 23 Mr. Henderson, accompanied by Mr. Alexander, made his dramatic arrival in Paris to confer personally with Foreign Minister Briand, M. Dumont and other high French officials. Within twenty-four hours Mr. Henderson and Mr. Alexander left Paris for Rome, where they conferred with Premier Mussolini and Foreign Minister Grandi on February 26 and 27.¹⁶ Within less than a week from the time they had left London the British delegation was back in Paris, and on March 1 an official *communiqué* announced the conclusion of a full "agreement." In a telegram dispatched to Foreign Minister Grandi of Italy, M. Briand and Mr. Henderson declared:

"We are delighted to inform you that we are in entire agreement with you in the arrangement negotiated in Rome for the settlement of the questions concerning the limitation of naval armaments which has been pending since the discussion of the Treaty of London. . . . We are convinced that the agreement reached between the representatives of our three countries will greatly contribute to the general progress of the work of consolidating peace in the world."¹⁷

Thus was announced to the world the solution of a controversy which for more than a year had disturbed Franco-Italian relations, threatened the London Naval Treaty and disquieted all Europe.

THE "BASES OF AGREEMENT"

The text of this "agreement," which subsequently proved so illusory, was not made public until March 11, when it was given out by the Foreign Offices of the three countries concerned.¹⁸ It then revealed that the accord actually embodied only the "Bases of Agreement" and contained no details of building programs. The definitive agreement was to be drafted subsequently by the naval experts of the three powers before final ratification. To the layman, the Bases of Agreement were so abstract and the phrasing so obscure as to be well-nigh unintelligible.

Stripped of all technicalities, the outstanding points of agreement were:

(1) The stabilization of the French and Italian fleets for the period of the London Naval Treaty (December 31, 1936);

(2) France was to retain a superiority over Italy in battleships and submarines, as well as in older cruisers and destroyers, while in new construction to be completed the tonnage of the two powers was to be approximately equal.

(3) The question of "parity" was to be avoided by a declaration in the following sense to be signed either by Great Britain, France and Italy, or else by all the parties to the London Conference,

"It is understood that the present arrangement established no permanent ratio in any category of ship as between the Members of the British Commonwealth of Nations, France and Italy. In particular, no precedent is being created for the final solution of the question whether, and if so in what manner, tonnage remaining over-age on the 31st of December, 1936, may ultimately be replaced."¹⁹

TEXT OF THE PROVISIONAL AGREEMENT

The subsequent misunderstanding over the "Bases of Agreement" and the new obstacles which again delayed a final accord make it necessary to review more closely the technical framework of the original document. The important points may be set forth as follows:

I. Capital Ships

- A. France and Italy may respectively complete two capital ships before December 31, 1936, not to exceed 23,333 tons each, the gun caliber of which will not exceed 12 inches.
- B. On completion of each ship, France will scrap one ship of the *Diderot*²⁰ class, and Italy will scrap approximately 16,820 tons of first-class over-age cruisers.
- C. Without prejudice to a general revision of the capital ship tonnages established by the Washington Treaty, the total tonnage in this category accorded to France and Italy shall be raised from 175,000 tons to 181,000 tons.²¹

II. Aircraft Carriers

France and Italy may complete, respectively, 34,000 tons of aircraft carriers before December 31, 1936.²²

III. Light Surface Vessels (regulated by the London Naval Treaty)

- A. Cruisers with guns with more than 6.1-inch caliber. No further construction after completion of the 1930 program.

16. *New York Times*, February 23, 1931.

17. *The Times* (London), March 2, 1931.

21. Great Britain, Foreign Office, *Memorandum on the Results of the Negotiations of France and Italy for the Reduction and Limitation of Naval Armaments*, Cmd. 3812 (London, H. M. Stationery Office, 1931). For unofficial text, cf. *New York Times*, March 12, 1931.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

23. A training ship of 17,597 tons, built in 1911.

24. The reason for this increase was explained in a memorandum signed by Mr. Henderson and Mr. Alexander.

25. By an exchange of letters between the Ministries of Marine of France and Italy, the two governments promised to give each other as long notice as possible of their intention to construct new capital ships and aircraft carriers.

B. Cruisers with guns with 6.1-inch caliber or less, and destroyers. The tonnage of new construction to be completed shall not exceed the tonnage which is replaceable in this category before December 31, 1936. Vessels already over-age and vessels becoming over-age during the period of the Treaty shall be scrapped on being replaced, except in cases where either France or Italy prefers to scrap instead equivalent tonnage . . . of cruisers with more than 6.1-inch caliber.

A declaration by the British, French and Italian governments adds that these countries do not intend to undertake the replacement of any destroyer which will be under 16 years of age by December 31, 1936.

IV. Submarines

No further construction other than for completion of the 1930 program and for the replacement of tonnage becoming over-age after December 31, 1936.

Subject to a general revision of the naval question at the Disarmament Conference of 1932, the tonnage of French submarines in commission will not exceed 81,989 tons.²⁶

V. General Provisions

France and Italy declare that they will accept the provisions of Part 3 of the London Treaty applying to Great Britain, the United States and Japan, and provisions of general application which do not conflict with the present arrangement.^{26a}

COMPARATIVE STRENGTH OF FRANCE AND ITALY

Without the inclusion of definite tonnage figures showing the present strength of the French and Italian navies and the levels contemplated under the agreement in 1936, it is difficult to estimate the results which this provisional agreement was intended to produce. The only complete figures showing the present strength, the authorized construction, and the composition of the French and Italian navies in 1936 are those published in the French press on March 13 with the authority of the French Ministry of Marine. These figures were regarded as "official."²⁷ They place the total tonnage of the French navy today at 628,603 tons, as compared with 395,002 tons for Italy. At the end of 1936, according to the French figures, France will have a total of 670,723 tons, as compared with 441,256 tons for Italy.

The distribution of tonnage of the two navies in 1931 and 1936 is shown in the following tables:

Strength of French and Italian Navies in 1931

	<i>France</i> (in tons)	<i>Italy</i> (in tons)
Capital ships	133,134	86,527
Over-age capital ships	52,791
Aircraft carriers	22,146
First-class cruisers	124,424 ²⁸	103,640 ³¹
Light cruisers, destroyers, etc.	198,233 ²⁹	151,363 ³²
Submarines	97,875 ³⁰	53,472 ³³
TOTALS	628,603	395,002

New Construction Which May be Placed in Commission Before December 31, 1936

	<i>France</i> (in tons)	<i>Italy</i> (in tons)
Capital ships	46,666	46,666
Aircraft carriers	34,000	34,000
Light cruisers, destroyers, etc.	51,331	46,158
Submarines	4,441	2,791
TOTALS	136,438	129,615

26. Under the London Naval Treaty, Great Britain, the United States and Japan agreed to limit submarines at 52,700 tons. In view of this fact, Great Britain accepted the French figures of 81,989 tons subject to the following conditions:

"The Members of the British Commonwealth of Nations maintain that this figure of 81,989 tons is too high in relation to their destroyer figure of 150,000 under the London Naval Treaty, but they agree to notify the other signatories of Part 3 of the London Treaty that they will not have recourse to Article 21 pending the general revision of the naval questions mentioned above. Should it not be possible at the 1932 Conference to arrive at a satisfactory equilibrium between the French submarine tonnage and the British Commonwealth destroyer tonnage, the Members of the British Commonwealth

of Nations will retain their right to make such increase as they may judge necessary in their destroyer figure of 150,000 tons."

26a. There follows the reference to "parity" quoted above.

27. *Le Temps* (Paris), March 13, 1931.

28. Including the *Jeanne-d'Arc-II*, *Condé* and *Michlet*, of 25,573 tons each.

29. Including 52,133 tons of over-age vessels.

30. Including 15,886 tons of over-age submarines.

31. Including 33,640 tons of over-age vessels.

32. Including 45,355 tons of over-age vessels.

33. Including 6,082 tons of over-age submarines.

Projected Strength of French and Italian Navies, December 31, 1936

	<i>France</i> (in tons)	<i>Italy</i> (in tons)
New capital ships	46,666	46,666
Old capital ships	133,134	86,527
Over-age capital ships ³⁴	17,597
Aircraft carriers	56,146	34,000
First-class cruisers	70,000	70,000
Over-age first-class cruisers	24,851
Light cruisers, destroyers	198,233	151,363
Over-age light cruisers	42,107
Submarines	81,989	47,390
Over-age submarines	5,310
TOTALS	670,723	441,256

These "official" French figures show that the Agreement authorized several modifications in the position taken by France at the London Naval Conference. During the London Conference, France insisted upon a global tonnage of 713,000 tons on December 31, 1936—43,000 tons more than the figure accepted in the 1931 Agreement. At the London Conference France announced that new construction from 1930 to 1936 would total 240,000 tons—roughly 104,000 tons more than the amount accepted in the "Bases of Agreement."³⁵ Finally, at the London Conference France was understood to have insisted upon a superiority of 240,000 tons

over Italy. Under the "Bases of Agreement" France accepted a superiority over Italy in all types of vessels of 229,467 tons.

Italy, it would appear, was induced to accept this arrangement granting France a total superiority of 229,000 tons because it actually gave France only 98,000 tons more than Italy in "new" or modern vessels. The remainder of the French surplus tonnage was accounted for in over-age ships or special vessels. The actual strength of the French and Italian navies on December 31, 1936 in ships under the age limit, assuming that the tonnage allowed under the Agreement is built, would be as follows:³⁶

Comparative Strength in Modern Vessels, France and Italy, December 31, 1936

	<i>France</i> (in tons)	<i>Italy</i> (in tons)
Capital ships	46,666	46,666
Aircraft carriers	56,146	34,000
Cruisers of more than 6.1-inch guns	70,000	70,000
Small cruisers and destroyers	198,233	151,363
Submarines	81,989 ³⁷	52,700
TOTALS	453,034	354,729

At the time the tonnage figures were published in France, there was apparently no claim that the Agreement did not correspond with the official French interpretation. On the contrary, the accord was generously praised. *Le Temps* declared editorially that M. Grandi's interpretation

"... corresponds exactly with ours: This is an agreement in which, from the diplomatic standpoint, there is neither victor nor vanquished, but for the three powers a common victory of good sense and justice, leaving behind it neither re-

crimination nor bitterness nor regret, but indicating, on the contrary, a mutual confidence favorable for the solution of other problems 'no less important to the peace of Europe and of the world.'"³⁸

BREAKDOWN
OF THE ACCORD

The first intimation of possible difficulties over the replacement of over-age vessels

36. From table submitted to Parliament by A. V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty, March 11, 1931. Cf. *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 249, No. 76, column 1166.

37. This figure was unacceptable to Great Britain in permanent relation to its destroyer tonnage figure of 150,000 tons. It has been accepted temporarily, pending a satisfactory solution at the 1932 Conference.

38. *Le Temps* (Paris), March 16, 1931. The *Journal des Débats* (Paris) was more critical and charged that France had "sacrificed its margin of superiority." But even this paper, which later became extremely bitter, did not charge that France's position had been misinterpreted. (Cf. *Journal des Débats*, March 20, 27, April 3, 17, et seq.)

34. Not limited by the Washington Treaty.

35. The French construction program for 1930-1931, amounting to approximately 40,000 tons, which was adopted between the end of the London Conference and the negotiation of the Agreement with Italy, should be deducted. The actual "concession" by France, therefore, amounted to approximately 64,000 tons.

came from Paris. On March 20 the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French Chamber, after a discussion of the Franco-Anglo-Italian Naval Agreement, decided that it would not make any definite decision until the Naval Committee had given its opinion on the technical points involved, especially on the results to France and Italy in the matter of "new construction and replacement," as well as on the division of the global tonnage between the different categories.³⁹

The next day, at a joint meeting of the Naval Committee and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, various members asked M. Dumont, Minister of Marine, for details. His reply took up all possible objections to the Agreement and ended with the following significant statement:

"Besides the two cruisers of 23,300 tons, whose construction is allowed us in the years of 1931, 1932, and 1933, nothing forbids our constructing what seems necessary to us in 1934, 1935, and 1936 (with the reservation of any new agreement or decision of the conference of 1932)."⁴⁰

This was the first official indication by a responsible official that the French government interpreted the Bases of Agreement as giving them the right to begin replacing all of their over-age ships before the termination of the Agreement.⁴¹

On March 21 the announcement of the proposed customs union between Germany and Austria was made public. The news created a furor in the press, and seriously alarmed the French government. What effect the Austro-German project may have had on the course of the naval negotiations during the following weeks cannot be ascertained. The fact remains, however, that Foreign Minister Briand, who with Mr. Henderson had been largely responsible for the naval accord, was made the victim of a bitter campaign in the nationalist press. The entire Briand policy of conciliation and *rapprochement* with Germany was held to be responsible for the resurrection of an aggressive Germany.⁴²

The effect of these fears, heightened by

indications that Italy would not protest the Austro-German union with equal fervor, was to stiffen French foreign policy all along the line.

By April 1 the existence of a fundamental controversy under the terms of the original naval agreement could no longer be denied, and by April 6 the Paris press was declaring that the "Bases of Agreement" had never been properly explained to Italy, and implied that Mr. Henderson had been the chief culprit.⁴³

CAUSE OF THE CONTROVERSY

The precise nature of the dispute was not fully revealed at the time, and no official explanation of what the French press characterized a "negotiatory misunderstanding" has yet been made public by any of the governments directly concerned. The fullest explanations have come from reputedly semi-official sources in Paris. The French government was represented as claiming the right to commence the replacement of approximately 66,000 tons of "over-age" ships during 1934, 1935 and 1936, to be completed and placed in commission in 1937, immediately after the expiration of the agreement. In effect, this program would permit France to transform its superiority over Italy in new ships from 98,000 tons on December 31, 1936 to 164,000 tons on January 1, 1937.

The French interpretation of the Bases of Agreement is apparently based on the following paragraph relating to light cruisers and destroyers:

"The tonnage of new construction *to be completed*⁴⁴ shall not exceed the tonnage which is replaceable in this category before December 31, 1936."

From this paragraph alone it may be argued that additional new construction, which is not to be completed until after December 31, 1936, is not prohibited by the text. But British and Italian commentators point out that the last sentence of the Agreement specifically declared that "no precedent is being created for the final solution of the question whether, or in what manner, tonnage remaining over age on December 31, 1936, may ultimately be replaced."

39. *Le Temps* (Paris), March 20, 1931; *Journée Parlementaire*, p. 3.

40. *Le Temps* (Paris), March 21, 1931.

41. It was later reported that France had been informed of the Austro-German customs union project on the day preceding this meeting.

42. Cf. *Le Temps* (Paris), March 22, 1931 *et seq.*, and *Journal des Débats*, March 27, April 3, 1931 *et seq.*

43. Cf. *New York Herald Tribune*, April 4, 1931; *Le Temps* (Paris), April 3, 1931; *Journal des Débats*, April 10, 1931.

44. The italics are ours.

ATTITUDE OF GREAT BRITAIN AND ITALY

In Great Britain the charge was freely made that France did not put forward its claim to additional replacement tonnage until after the text of the accord had been made public. British commentators, moreover, pointed to the first official statements of M. Briand and M. Dumont to support their contention that France had experienced "a change of heart" and was injecting a new claim after agreement in principle had been reached.

The Italian press likewise took exception to the French claim. A leading newspaper declared on April 8:

"It is said . . . that the technical experts of the two countries differ as to the interpretation of the bases of the naval accord. We assert that no divergence can exist, if there is a sincere desire to maintain these bases, in the drafting of which most careful consideration was taken of the exigencies of the two countries, and especially of France. The language of the figures is most clear; as was said at the time, they assure the French navy a numerical *de facto* superiority over that of Italy from today until 1936, leaving unprejudiced the question, *de jure*, of parity, which will eventually be once more taken into consideration. The replacement of over-age ships, as will be recalled, is deferred until after 1936; not only that, but it is explicitly agreed in the naval accord that the possession of antiquated ships would not give France the right to present larger claims to fix the new quotas of its tonnage after that period.

". . . It should be pointed out and reiterated in a most unequivocal fashion that any alteration of the accord of Rome with respect to the substitution of over-age French vessels would mean a change in the respective positions of France and Italy, and thus the breakdown of the equilibrium."⁴⁶

On April 4 the drafting committee which had been meeting in London adjourned "for the Easter holidays." Although the committee re-assembled in London on April 14, little progress was made with the drafting. The British and Italian governments strongly resisted the French claim to what they regarded as additional replacements, while the French Ministry of Marine declined to withdraw its claim. On April 22 the French Foreign Office delivered identical notes to the British and Italian governments, setting forth the position taken by the French gov-

ernment. The text of these notes was not made public, but they were understood to reaffirm France's right to replacements prior to 1936, while offering to postpone the actual construction for about a year—that is, from 1934 to 1935. The British reply to the French note was dispatched on April 25, while the Italian government gave its answer a few days later. Both governments rejected the French "compromise" offer, although the British note was understood to contain counter proposals offering a basis for further negotiations. Private conversations were held during the May 1931 meeting of the Council, but apparently no solution was found.

THE FUTURE OF THE BATTLESHIP

Whatever the outcome of the Franco-Italian controversy, the negotiations themselves brought out one new development in naval armaments which may have important repercussions at the Disarmament Conference in 1932. The Bases of Agreement revealed the fact that all three European naval powers definitely favored a reduction in the size of battleships, and that France and Italy intended to build ships of 23,000 tons with 12-inch-guns, instead of the 35,000-ton, 16-inch-gun ships authorized by the Washington Conference. Moreover, the agreement authorized France and Italy to increase their capital ship tonnage from 175,000 (the maximum allowed by the Washington Treaty) to 181,000 tons. This increase was made to permit France to build two new battleships of 23,333 tons without scrapping a larger number of battleships than contemplated by the Washington Treaty. Any such modification of the Washington Treaty, however, will be a matter of concern to the other signatories—the United States and Japan—and will require the consent of these powers.^{46a}

^{46a} When the Bases of Agreement were first made public it was assumed that France and Italy would adhere to Part III of the London Naval Treaty, and that the United States and Japan would participate in the drafting of a definitive accord. The United States, however, declined to take part in the negotiations in London, apparently because of difficulties which might be encountered if the London Treaty was again submitted to the Senate for ratification. The State Department took the position that the United States was not directly concerned with the Franco-Italian accord, but informed the interested powers that it had no objection to the Bases of Agreement. Should France and Italy proceed with the construction of the two new battleships, the United States and Japan would apparently be called upon to approve the modifications in the Washington Treaty, either by an exchange of notes or by formal ratification of a new agreement.

⁴⁶ "Il Linguaggio delle Cifre" (The Language of Figures), editorial in *Corriere della Sera*, April 8, 1931.

While the United States officially took the position that it was not directly concerned in any agreement reached by France and Italy, and declined an invitation to take part in the meeting of experts in London, there was little doubt that naval circles in Washington were disturbed by the prospect of having the issue of battleships—and indeed the whole naval issue— injected into the 1932 Conference with the United States alone holding out for the maximum size of capital ships.

The desire of Great Britain and the Continental naval powers to reduce the size of future battleships had been known for several years. France and Italy had not built a battleship of any kind since 1916, and had not shown any interest in replacing their old vessels until the appearance of the new German "pocket battleships" in 1930.⁴⁷

The first official proposal for reduction in the size of battleships was made by Great Britain at the ill-fated Geneva Naval Conference called by President Coolidge in 1927, when it proposed a reduction from 35,000 tons "to something under 30,000 tons," and "reduction in the size of guns in battleships from the present limit of 16 inches to 13.5 inches."⁴⁸ The breakdown of the 1927 Conference on the cruiser issue prevented discussion of this proposal.

At the London Naval Conference every power but the United States favored a substantial reduction in the size of future battleships. Great Britain openly favored a reduction in the size of battleships from 35,000 tons to 25,000 tons, and of guns from 16 inches to 12 inches; this was supported in principle by France, Italy and Japan.⁴⁹ Italy went even further and offered "to examine favorably the abolition of capital ships," should the other powers concur.⁵⁰ Japan deemed it "desirable that an agreement should be reached so as to reduce the size of capital ships to 25,000 tons, from 35,000 tons stipulated in the Washington Treaty," and suggested that "the maximum gun calibre should be reduced to 14 inches."⁵¹

Thus, at the London Conference, the four other naval powers placed themselves on record as favoring the abandonment of the big battleship and its eventual replacement by a smaller unit.

American naval experts have produced many arguments to support their defense of the 35,000-ton battleship. Briefly these are:

1. That the large battleship is the only vessel which can inflict and receive heavy pounding, and is the "backbone of the fleet."
2. That because of our lack of far-flung naval bases, the United States must possess large ships of the widest possible cruising radius. Great Britain, with a chain of twenty-six fueling stations encircling the globe, can naturally meet her naval requirements with smaller vessels than the United States, which has only seven scattered bases in the Caribbean and the Pacific.
3. That the large battleship is also essential to the United States because of its extensive trade routes and overseas commerce, which are entitled to just as much protection as British commerce.
4. That a reduction in the size of battleships would automatically confer superiority on the British fleet, both because of Britain's superior merchant marine tonnage and her large number of naval bases.

A majority of American naval experts challenge the contention that the battleship has been rendered "obsolete" by the airplane or the submarine. They declare that the battleship, because of its heavy armor protection and reinforced decks, is the only naval vessel that can possibly withstand an air attack.⁵²

Some naval authorities share the view of Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond that there is no tactical reason for the huge capital ship. In answer to the question "How large must be the fighting ship of the power threatened with invasion?" Admiral Richmond declares:⁵³

"The answer is plain. Provided she is strong enough to be able, with certainty, to compel surrender upon a ship carrying troops or goods, and is provided in numbers sufficient to deal with the situations that will arise (geographical, strategical, tactical), she will be large enough to make her country secure against the danger of invasion."

47. Under the Washington Treaty, France and Italy were permitted to lay down two new battleships each in 1927 and 1929, to replace over-age vessels. Neither country exercised this option at the time.

48. Geneva, *Records of the Conference for the Limitation of Naval Armament, held in Geneva from June 20 to August 4, 1927*, p. 22.

49. *Documents of the London Naval Conference*, cited, p. 524, 525, 532 and 533.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 528.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 533.

52. It is interesting to note that the same conclusion was reached in 1921, following the bombing from aircraft of the ex-German vessels which had been allocated to the United States after the World War. In its report on these exercises, the joint board expressed the conclusion that "the battleship is still the backbone and the bulwark of the Nation's sea defense" and that it has not been made obsolete by the airplane. *Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1921*, p. 3.

53. *Foreign Affairs* (New York), April 1931.

The matter of size, he points out, is purely relative. "Commodore Oliver Perry's brigs and schooners on Lake Erie, having won the battle of Lake Erie, were capable of exercising command on that Lake . . . larger ships are not necessary for what is called 'battle.' Two or two score destroyers or corvettes, two or two score light cruisers or frigates, two or two score *Rodneys* or *Victorys* can equally fight to a finish or decision, just as two lightweights can fight as good and decisive a fight as a Dempsey or a Carpentier; and they can take as much punishment from their antagonists as the heavier ship or man from theirs."

The contention that the United States requires a battleship of 35,000 tons in order to insure a wide cruising radius has been criticized on the ground that at the present time neither the United States nor any other power possesses a single 35,000-ton battleship.⁵⁴ The largest American vessel is the *California* of 32,000 tons, and five ships of the present American fleet range from 26,000 tons to 28,000 tons each. Moreover, three of the American battleships which are now being "modernized" and which have a cruising radius of 25,000 miles are vessels of 30,000 tons displacement—5,000 tons less than the standard size regarded as essential for American needs.

In part because of its opposition to reduction in size of capital ships, the American Navy Department is opposed to reopening the naval question at the Disarmament Conference. The Navy Department takes the position that the question of battleships was definitely settled at the London Naval Conference, and that the Treaty resulting from that Conference provides for further consideration in 1935.⁵⁵ The fact that Great Britain, France and Italy share a common desire to reduce the size of capital ships, and that the latter countries are about to proceed with the construction of a new and smaller type of ship, would indicate that the issue will be raised at any rate in Geneva in 1932.

If the United States insists upon retaining the 35,000-ton battleship and succeeds in blocking a reduction in size at the Disarmament Conference next year, it will be placed in a difficult position in 1936, it is pointed out. By the end of 1936, seven of the fifteen American capital ships will be

technically "over-age," and by 1943 the entire fleet will be "obsolete." If the present 35,000-ton ships are to be replaced, therefore, an entirely new fleet will have to be built between 1936 and 1942.

The cost of building our last battleships, between 1919 and 1923, was approximately \$35,000,000 each. The cost in 1936 will be well over \$50,000,000, and may even approach \$75,000,000.⁵⁶ A program of fifteen 35,000-ton capital ships, therefore, will cost between \$750,000,000 and \$1,000,000,000—which will have to be added to the already high bill for cruisers, destroyers and submarines. In view of the difficulty of securing appropriations for smaller vessels permitted by the London Treaty, and the opposition to further expenditure on floating fortresses which many believe have outlived their usefulness, the adoption of a gigantic battleship program is likely to be fraught with difficulty.

CONCLUSION

If a final settlement of the Franco-Italian controversy is not reached in the near future, agreement will be rendered even more difficult by the adoption of building programs for the year 1931-1932. Until June 18 neither power had put its new program into effect. Admiral Sirianni, the Italian Minister of Marine, in a speech on the naval estimates on May 27, 1931, intimated that Italy would probably be compelled to begin two 23,000-ton battleships as well as aircraft carriers, and that the tonnage of new ships would be greater than last year.⁵⁷ In France, unexpected opposition to the inclusion of the 23,000-ton battleships developed in the Chamber of Deputies when the program came up for discussion on June 18, and the Chamber demanded the right to give a final opinion when the time came for fixing the characteristics of the new vessels.⁵⁸ While this development was believed to increase the chances of eventual agreement, statesmen in the three countries did not minimize the difficulties of reaching a full accord before the meeting of the General Disarmament Conference.

54. Great Britain possesses one battle cruiser, the *Hood*, built in 1920 with a displacement of 42,000 tons. The *Rodney* and the *Nelson* have a displacement of 33,500 tons.

55. Cf. "The London Naval Conference," cited.

56. Application of new processes and equipment in naval construction has greatly increased the costs of all types of vessels. Thus the estimates for new 10,000-ton cruisers have increased from \$17,500,000 in 1930 to more than \$20,000,000 in 1931.

57. Cf. *The Times* (London), May 28, 1931.

58. Cf. *New York Times*, June 19, 1931.